



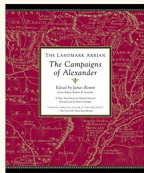
A Reader's Guide To GRECO-BACTRIA & THE INDO-GREEKS

Created by The Hellenistic Age Podcast

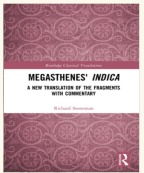


Following the campaigns of Alexander the Great, the Greek world would extend its reach into Central Asia and Northwest India, where Hellenistic culture would flourish for several centuries. Unfortunately, this period is poorly documented, and its sources are scattered or confused at best. As part of my "Hellenistic Far East" series, I have found these books particularly helpful in covering the time from Alexander to the Kushan Empire (4th century B.C. – 2nd century A.D.)

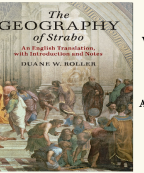
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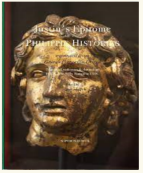
Arrian - The Anabasis and Indica
Arguably the most reliable of the Alexander historians, Arrian wrote a complete account of the Macedonian invasion of Asia, including Bactria and the Punjab from 330-326 B.C. Additionally, he dedicated an entire book on India, relying on eyewitness accounts from the campaigns like Ptolemy I Soter, Nearchus the Admiral, and Megasthenes. The Landmark Edition is my preferred edition due to its maps and notes, but it does not include the Indica, while Oxford World Classics combines both into a single volume.



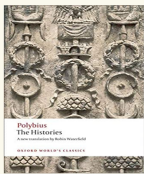
Megasthenes - Indica
Megasthenes was an official of Seleucus I Nicator who travelled to the court of the Indian emperor Chandragupta Maurya, before writing a work known as the Indica. Though it does not survive, the Indica was extensively quoted and paraphrased by later authors due to his rather astute observations on Indian society, the Mauryan government, and various topics like elephant hunting, albeit from a Greek point of view. The fragments have been translated and collected into a single volume by R. Stoneman.



Strabo - The Geography
Working in the time of Augustus Caesar, Strabo is one of the most prolific Greco-Roman authors to write on Bactria and India, providing details on its history, geography, and more. Books 11 and 15 are focused on Central Asia and India, and rely on now-lost sources like Megasthenes' Indica and Apollodorus' Parthika. Along with Justin, Strabo provides the most information on the Greco-Bactrians and Indo-Greeks. D.W. Roller's translation is highly recommended.



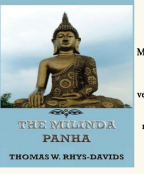
Justin - Epitome of the Philippic Histories
An epitome of an earlier "universal history", Justin is similar to Strabo in his use of lost historians, but he also provides one of the few relatively complete accounts of the Seleucid and Parthian empires, both of which the Greco-Bactrians/Indo-Greeks play significant roles. Translations by J.C. Yardley are more academically rigorous, but a single-volume edition is made available through Sophon publishing.



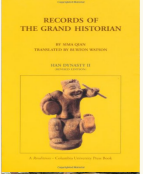
Polybius - The Histories
More famous for chronicling Rome's rise to power, Books 10 and 11 of Polybius' work are focused on the career of Antiochus III of the Seleucid Empire, who waged against Euthydemus I of Bactria from 208-206 B.C., and likely was able to draw from official Seleucid records. Unfortunately, the relevant passages are heavily fragmented, and are only available in the Loeb Editions or online through Lacus Curtius.



Anonymous - The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea
Written in Greek by an anonymous Roman sailor, the Periplus ('to sail around') provides an itinerary of maritime destinations in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean during the 1st century A.D. While he is more focused on the economic side of Indo-Roman trade, the author provides several interesting observations relating to the Indo-Greeks, Indo-Parthians, and the early Kushan Empire. The translated and heavily annotated version by L. Casson is recommended.



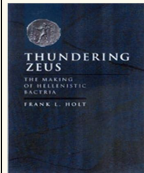
Anonymous - The Milinda Panha
A Pali text also known as the "Questions of King Milinda", the story revolves around a Buddhist sage named Nagasena who debates and successfully converts the Yona King Milinda, who is almost certainly the Indo-Greek ruler Menander I Soter. It is mainly a vehicle to articulate the teachings of the Buddha and was written long after Menander's death, but it is the only Indian work to explicitly speak about an Indo-Greek ruler, and indicates the reverence for Menander within Buddhist cultural memory. English translations are available from T.W. Rhys-Davids and the more modern I.B. Horner.



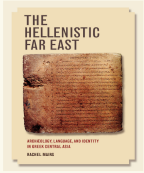
Sima Qian - Records of the Grand Historian
An important foundational text of Chinese history dating to the Han period, the most relevant passage is Book 123, "The Account of Dayuan", which preserves the writings of Zhang Qian, an envoy of the Han Emperor Wudi, who wrote a report on his visit to Bactria and Sogdiana in 128 B.C. Along with being the first documented encounter between China and Central Asia, Zhang Qian gives a picture of the former Greco-Bactrian kingdom, which had collapsed only a few years before his arrival. Book 123 is collected and published by Columbia University Press under "Han Dynasty II", translated by B. Watson.

Secondary

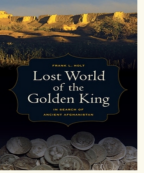
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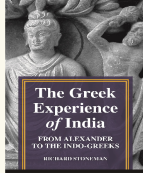
Thundering Zeus - F.L. Holt
Numismatics, the study of coins, is probably the most reliable tool used to reconstruct the histories of the Greco-Bactrians and Indo-Greeks. Holt provides an excellent introduction to both coin studies and Greco-Bactria by focusing on its earliest independent dynasty, the Diodotids. Conveniently, he also includes a near-complete collection of translated passages and inscriptions related to the Greeks of Bactria and India.



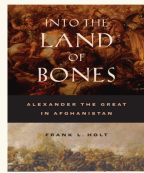
The Hellenistic Far East - R. Maiz
Tackling the other side, Maiz focuses more on the archaeology of Hellenistic Bactria and India, providing an overview of the re-discovered Greco-Bactrian city of Ai Khanoum, and analyzes inscriptions like the Heliodorus Pillar in Madya Pradesh or the Sophyos Stele, with an emphasis on the question of identity and how it is to be perceived in the face of complex evidence.



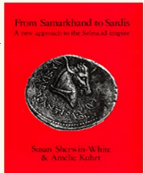
Lost World of the Golden King - F.L. Holt
A companion piece to "Thundering Zeus", Holt focuses more on the history of Bactrian coin studies, showing how coins can be used (or misused) to recreate a historical narrative, along with the deleterious impact of war and political instability on the preservation of Afghanistan's cultural heritage.



The Greek Experience of India - R. Stoneman
The arrival of Alexander the Great precipitated over three centuries of close contact between the Greek and Indian worlds, and in this work, Stoneman combats through the writings of Greco-Roman and Indian authors alike to find evidence of their interaction. The meat of the book is centered around a discussion of Megasthenes' Indica, but also includes cross-cultural comparisons of topics like philosophy and literature.



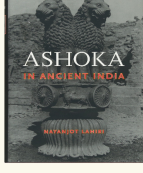
Into the Land of Bones - F.L. Holt
The invasions of Bactria and Sogdiana were arguably the most challenging campaigns in Alexander's career, marked by brutal massacres and military occupation on a previously unseen scale. Holt gives an account of the Macedonian invasion and the policies which Alexander put into place, but also draws comparisons with more modern military operations in the region, such as the "Great Game" of the 19th century, or the Soviet and American invasions of the 20th and 21st centuries.



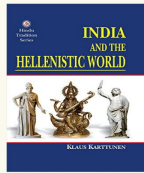
From Samarkand to Sardis - S.S. White & A. Kuhr
Though Alexander is often given the lion's share of credit for the spread of Greek culture into Central Asia and India, the Syrian-based Seleucid dynasty did most of the heavy lifting. This single volume concisely summarizes the history and policies of the Seleucids with regards to city founding, kingship, and their involvement with Bactria and the Mauryan Empire.



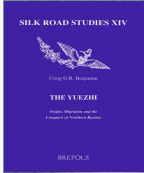
The Parthians: The Forgotten Empire - U. Ellerbrock
The story of the Parthian Empire is intimately tied up with that of the Greco-Bactrians, and their role in shaping the political map of Hellenistic Central Asia and Mesopotamia makes them essential to study. Ellerbrock provides a convenient one-volume work on Parthian history, culture, and society, along with many helpful images and comparisons of chronological frameworks.



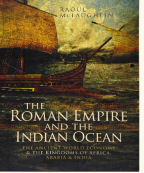
Ashoka in Ancient India - N. Lahiri
Ashoka the Great, the third ruler of the Mauryan Empire of India, became one of the most influential figures in Buddhist history following his conversion in the mid-third century B.C. Lahiri gives an account of Ashoka's life and an overview of the Mauryan Empire, but particularly focuses on the many edicts that the emperor ordered to be set up across India and Central Asia, including inscriptions written in Greek and placed near the city of Alexandria-in-Arachosia (modern Kandahar, Afghanistan).



India and the Hellenistic World - K. Karttunen
Similar in form to Stoneman's work, Karttunen provides an almost encyclopedic account of any topic relating to the Hellenistic world and South Asia, ranging from linguistics and mythology to flora and fauna, making it an invaluable reference book for any available subject.



The Yuezhi: Origin, Migration and the Conquest of Northern Bactria - C. Benjamin
The invasion of the Yuezhi, a powerful nomadic confederation originating from the Gansu Corridor, was the major external contributing factor behind the collapse of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom. Benjamin traces their earliest history to their settlements in northern Bactria, where they would eventually form the Kushan Empire and adopt several aspects of Hellenistic culture.

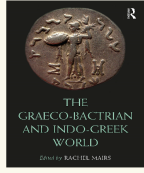


The Roman Empire and the Silk Routes - R. McLaughlin
Thanks to a period of relative stability from the 1st century B.C. - 3rd century A.D., a vast trading network stretching from the Mediterranean and Red Sea to China and India flourished, as goods like Roman glassware, Chinese silk, and Indian spices were carried throughout Afro-Eurasia. Though I may take some arguments with a grain of salt, McLaughlin's willingness to cover many of the lesser-known players makes his book a valuable survey of the history and economies of Central/South Asia following the Hellenistic period.



The Art of Gandhara in the Metropolitan Museum of Art - K.A. Behrendt
From the 1st-4th centuries A.D., an artistic tradition developed in ancient Gandhara (southern Afghanistan and Pakistan), where local craftsmen created beautiful works of art centered around the life of the Buddha, but were deeply inspired by Greco-Roman designs and myths, such as the creation of the anthropomorphic Buddha and adoption of Hercules-Vajrapani. Full of color photos, Behrendt's volume serves as a good introduction to Gandharan studies.

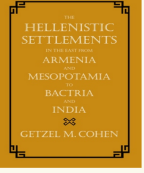
Miscellaneous/Reference



The Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek World
A rather hefty book with contributions by several important authors of the field, this can functionally act as a complete survey of the current research of Hellenistic Central Asia and India, but it is not necessarily suited for a cover-to-cover read. It is divided into several sections and themes, but the largest portions is spent on archaeological regions of geographic regions.



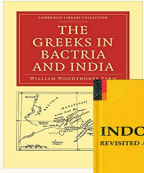
Monnaies Gréco-Bactriennes et Indo-Grecques - O. Bopearachchi
Considered the quintessential reference book on the coins of Greco-Bactria and the Indo-Greeks, which are often the only surviving evidence for their kings and queens. At the time of writing, it is only available in French, but Bopearachchi plans to release an updated version in English as of late 2022/early 2023.



The Hellenistic Settlements in the East from Armenia and Mesopotamia to Bactria and India - G. Cohen
The last of a three-volume work, Cohen provides a complete encyclopaedia of all settlements founded by or associated with Alexander the Great through the Indo-Greeks, including a list of sources and general summary of information associated with each location.



Gandhara Connections Publications
Each year since 2017, Oxford University has published a collection of papers from workshops focusing on the art of Gandhara and associated themes, such as international connectivity, modern reception, and chronology. These publications are open access, free to download from the Archaeopress website, and thus are highly recommended.



The Greeks in Bactria and India - W.W. Tarn
The Indo-Greeks: Revised and Supplemented - A.K. Narain

Tarn and Narain were major pioneers of Greco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek studies, but their works are products of their time, more valuable when read from a historiographical perspective. Tarn's reconstructions based on coin portraits fall apart in the face of hard scrutiny, and his writings tend to reflect the attitudes of 20th century British elites with regards to classical civilization. Narain was deeply colored by anti-colonialist movements in India during the 1940's and 50's, and is overly eager to refute the possibility of any lasting Greek impact in Indian history. Of the two, Narain is more reliable, but decades of new research and archaeological discoveries have radically changed our understanding.

